Integrated Land Records for Maine

The Maine GeoLibrary recommends a $1.575 million bonds initiative to seed a 2010 program and attract local and federal dollars.

What properties have water access? Where is the land in the Tree Growth program? Where is the real estate in foreclosure or in pre-foreclosure status? How many private parcels abut or are in visual range of wind farms? How many individual properties lie over a particular wetland or deer yard? Where are all of the properties that have sold or split in the past year?

All of these questions can be answered with simple queries against an integrated land records database linking the records currently maintained in Maine. At present, answering any of these questions involves time costly searches of records maintained at several levels of government.

When land records keyed to digital parcel maps (such as tax maps) are integrated with information from municipalities, counties and state agencies, the resulting efficiencies and economies promote more effective land planning and governance. The Integrated Land Records System project aims to capture these public benefits.

Over the past two decades geographic information systems (GIS) have been used to enable these tools, primarily at the local level in larger cities. Maine's GeoLibrary has taken impressive initial strides toward integrating these systems more cohesively through targeted grants and planning efforts over the past seven years.
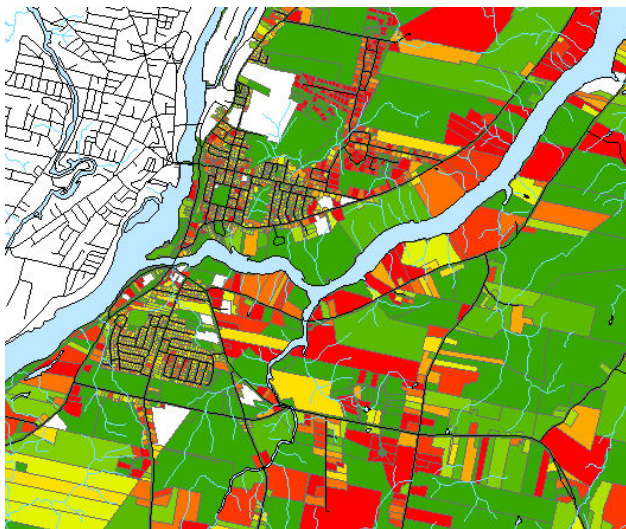

Figure 1: Town parcel map color-coded in a GIS according to property value. The reds are higher value while the greens are lower.

But the overall coverage in the state remains spotty and inconsistent.   Maintenance of the data that do exist is not uniform or dependable, and hundreds of towns around the state have no access to the technology and its benefits.
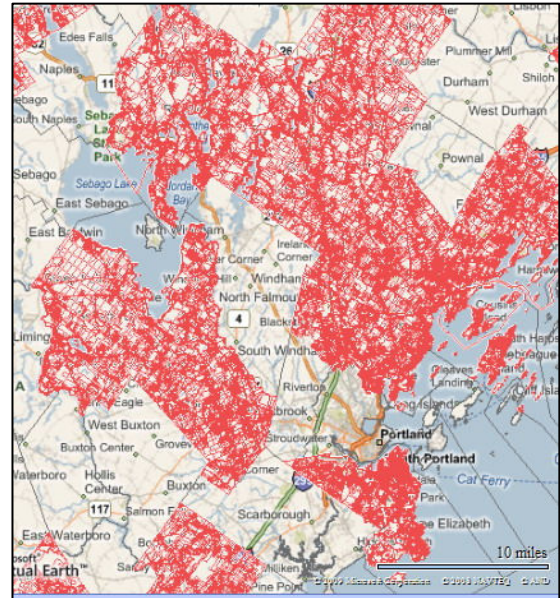

Figure 2: Map showing towns where digital parcel maps exist; note the large gaps in coverage, even in the densely populated Portland area.

Digital parcel mapping is the only practical means to exhaustively inventory property records, locally, regionally or statewide.   It provides an intelligent map that may be queried, symbolized, shared and refined to deliver a common operating picture for all potential users of property records data --- not just property assessors, lawyers or appraisers, but analysts, regulators and enforcement officers in environmental agencies, transportation, health and economic development.

The GeoLibrary is developing plans and processes that will advance Maine rapidly toward an integrated system for managing and accessing property records. It has been a sustained process of information gathering and support-building, and has the endorsement of all GIS-using state departments, numerous federal agencies, hundreds of municipalities and a large number of commercial and non-governmental entities.

In Maine, where land plays such a vital role in local livelihoods and our collective sense of place, geographic information integration tools should be available to address and answer questions vital to our state and local interests.